

SPRING 2004

# AHA FEMINIST CAUCUS



NEWSLETTER OF THE FEMINIST CAUCUS OF THE AMERICAN HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

## Aileen Hernandez *Humanist Heroine 2004*

### AHA Feminist Caucus Humanist Heroines

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The Feminist Caucus is pleased to announce that Aileen C. Hernandez will be named "Humanist Heroine 2004" at the American Humanist Association's conference May 7-9, 2004, at the Stardust Hotel in Las Vegas.

Ms. Hernandez was the second national president of the National Organization for Women (1970-71). By profession, she is an urban consultant who has run her own firm since 1967. Hernandez Associates works with major U.S. companies, government agencies and foundations.

She was born in Brooklyn, New York, to parents from the West Indies who became naturalized citizens. She is a magna cum laude graduate of Howard University with a B.A. in Political Science and Sociology (1947). She earned a Master's degree in government with highest honors from California State University in Los Angeles (1961). She was awarded an honorary doctorate from Southern Vermont College (1979).

Pres. Lyndon Johnson appointed her as the only woman to the original five-member U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in 1965.



**Aileen Hernandez**

Ms. Hernandez chaired the Secretary's Advisory Committee on the Rights and Responsibilities of Women at what is now the Department of Health and Human Services, serving during the administrations of Sec. Joseph Califano and Sec. Patricia Harris.

She was a founding member of the Na-

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tional Women's Political Caucus, and National Hook-Up of Black Women. She was a member for 10 years on the Board of the Ms. Foundation for Women (1976-85).

She is Vice-Chair of the National Advisory Council of the American Civil Liberties Union. She is a Life Member of the NAACP, and serves in an advisory capacity with many groups, including the Girls' After School Academy in San Francisco.

She was a founding Board Member of Death Penalty Focus, committed to the

abolition of the death penalty. She served on the California Advisory Committee on the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. She has received numerous awards and citations for her community work, civil rights work and feminism.

Ms. Hernandez chairs the California Women's Agenda (CAWA), an electronic grassroots network of 600 women's groups working to implement the plan of Action adopted by 189 nations at the Fourth International Conference on Women in Beijing, China, in 1995.

## **AHA Conference Info— *Annual Meeting of Feminist Caucus Gathers***

The 63rd annual American Humanist Association conference, "Humanism: Oasis in the Desert," takes place at the Stardust Resort and Casino in Las Vegas, Nev., from Friday, May 7 through Sunday, May 9.

The Feminist Caucus annual meeting will take place sometime during the day on Friday. Please check with the AHA office for the schedule, which was not available as of presstime.

Meg Bowman, the dynamo and activist who formerly co-directed the AHA Feminist Caucus for at least a decade, is planning a very special annual AHA Feminist Caucus meeting for you! Also planning

to attend and make a presentation is Rosemary Matson, a previous "Humanist Heroine" recipient. Don't miss it!

To make a reservation with the Stardust Resort and Casino, phone 800/634-6757. Remember to mention the AHA's group code, AHA0504, to receive the convention rate of \$80 plus tax per night. The cut-off date for registration is April 4.

For full information on registration check your AHA periodicals, phone the AHA office at 800/837-3792 or go to:

<http://www.americanhumanist.org/conference/>

*AHA Feminist Caucus*

*founded by*

*Gina Allen 1977*

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**Feminist Caucus  
Newsletter**

*Spring 2004*

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## **The Equal Rights Amendment: Still Needed, And Now Achievable** *by Jennifer S. Macleod, Ph.D.*

FACT: American women are still denied the Constitutionally-guaranteed fully equal rights with men that should have been their birthright many years ago. But surely, many say, don't America's women already enjoy fully equal rights, Constitution or no Constitution? No, they do not. All American women are still constrained in many practical as well as symbolic ways, by the lack of explicit Constitutional backing for their

right to full equality with men. In paid employment, as just one example, women on average still receive only 76% of male pay for fulltime, year-round work, and they still confront glass ceilings not faced by men. The effects are clearly enormous and damaging not just to women, but also to their families.

Women will not have that Constitutional

*Continued page 13*

# Women's Equality Under Attack

by *Kate Michelman*

## *2003 Humanist Heroine*

For those of us who believe in humankind and its future we can learn a lot from Humanism, starting with the ancient Greeks right through to our very troubled twenty-first century. I am a Humanist. Humanism is the foundation of my life. In spite of the right wing's allegations that Humanists have no values, Humanism, as I understand it for myself, is devoted to the supremacy of reason as both a monument to human dignity and as a means to social progress. And that makes the Humanist movement and the pro-choice movement natural partners in a vision for our lives.

We share two important values. The first is that we respect the innate ability and right of every woman to make her own decisions, to employ moral and ethical reasoning, especially as relates to the most personal and profound decision about whether or not to bear a child.

It is extraordinary to me to really contemplate that we could live in a nation that would force women against their will to continue a pregnancy and bear a child. That puts women right on the same plane as animal species that don't possess moral reasoning, intelligence, and free will.

What distinguishes humans is that we do have the ability to reason, think, and exercise free will based on human moral and ethical values. Bringing a child into the world shouldn't be just a straight physical imperative. The fact that we can conceive and give birth doesn't necessarily mean it is imperative for us. And



Photo: August Berkshire

**Kate Michelman**

yet that is what the anti-choice movement is about in this nation: to force childbirth by law. And they're not just going state-by-state to make it happen. They want a federal law—indeed, if they could get it, a “human life” amendment to the constitution—that would literally rob women of their ability to exercise moral reasoning, any reasoning in women's reproductive and sexual lives.

It is hard to imagine that these people want to do this but they do and they're almost there. What we believe is that a woman has a right to make a decision for her own reasons and in her own way, in consultation with her conscience—alone if she chooses, with her physician if she prefers, or with her partner or her parents—but not with a politician.

The second belief that both our movements share is that societal progress and reason tell us that society starts in a single moment. The moment a woman decides to bear a child and the

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conditions under which that decision is made contribute tremendously to the kind of society we will become. Here are the conditions which NARAL Pro-Choice America and I seek: that no matter what choice a woman makes, society will stand with her and respect that choice. If she chooses not to become pregnant we will ensure that contraception is available to her; if she chooses to have an abortion it will be safe, dignified, and legal; and if she chooses to have a child, society will provide those conditions necessary to support the life that is brought in.

Surely no one who values human reason and social progress can accept a course of action that will lead children to be born against a mother's will, into circumstances under which they cannot thrive, and into a society that treats them as a politician's mandate rather than a parent's choice. Yet we are barreling right toward that destination. And if we hope for anything, it is that you and I must wrench our society off that trajectory and change the course of history. This is what we have a responsibility to do.

*Roe v. Wade* is hanging by a thread. The president and Congress are locked together in a deep hostility and opposition to a woman's right to choose. I was telling AHA Feminist Caucus President Annie Laurie Gaylor that women have been on a journey to full and equal rights—to human dignity—for more than a century. It has been a tough row to hoe. We had to get the right to vote, which wasn't one of the original constitutional rights of women. We had to win the right to use birth control. And you heard that the controversy with Sen. Rick Santorum (R-Penn), who compared homosexuality to other sorts of egregiously horrible things. But what a lot of people missed in his tirade against personal privacy and personal sexual lib-

erty is that he criticized *Griswold v. Connecticut*, the 1965 Supreme Court decision that recognized a couple's right to use birth control. He said that was wrong. First off he said there's no right to privacy in the constitution and then he criticized *Griswold*. I kept trying to get the press to take that up.

These people sort of occupy the space around abortion rights and make it sound as if women are on their way to the delivery room, stopping off to have an abortion—as if we are so unethical. They don't really deal with the real issue, that those who oppose reproductive freedom of choice also oppose women's equality, because these issues are synonymous. Women have no equality if we can't govern the most intimate aspects of our lives.

And what anti-choicers want isn't only to make illegal the choice to have an abortion but they also want to get right down to the issue of contraception. They would like women to have no right to contraception—especially no right to use a morning-after pill, the emergency contraception. NARAL is fighting in states all over the nation to make sure that emergency contraception, which prevents unintended pregnancy and the need for abortion, is available to women. We have to fight to make sure that female victims of sexual violence are told that emergency contraception is available to them when they go to the emergency room. Doctors weren't telling women that, nor that they can get it over the counter without a prescription in some states. This high dose, highly effective birth control pill works within seventy-two hours of unprotected sex and prevents the need for abortion. Yet we must fight tooth and nail to make it known and available to women. Pharmacists can even present problems with this. There is actually a group called Pharmacists

*Two hundred twenty-four Bush nominees have been confirmed and each of them, with the exception of one, possesses a judicial philosophy that would make your hair stand on end.*

for Life, which has been organizing around the country to oppose the filling of a doctor's prescription for emergency contraception as well as RU-486, better known as Mifepristone, the medical alternative to surgical abortion. This is a problem especially in New Mexico and California. We are doing this kind of work all over the nation because these people permeate the fabric of our social and political order.

Anybody who thinks this is simply about abortion is crazy. It is about control of women's lives and it is about the full range of reproductive and sexual matters. *Roe* stands as a monument, as the rightwingers perceive it, to everything they abhor about our society: judicial liberation, sexual liberation, and women's liberation. The conservatives who are now in power have to tear *Roe* down in order to make progress and they aren't going to stop. So the thirtieth anniversary of *Roe* should give us a great deal of concern.

We concentrate on maintaining these rights instead of working on what I would like us to work on, such as addressing the conditions that cause three million women every year to face an unintended pregnancy. Something is



AHA Feminist Caucus director Annie Laurie Gaylor presenting the Humanist Heroine plaque to Kate Michelman.

wrong when that happens. Three million unplanned pregnancies every year! We should be looking at why this occurs and addressing those conditions. Instead, we are fighting for the very lives of women, the very rights of women, the very essence of value for life: being able to choose when to bring life into this world. It is hanging by a thread.

For the first time since *Roe*, Congress and the White House are currently controlled by people who want to take away this right. In fact, this is the first time since President Herbert Hoover, I believe, that we have had such hugely conservative, far-right control of all the institutions of national government. President George W. Bush is moving our courts too far to the right. Two hundred twenty-four Bush nominees have been confirmed and each of them, with the exception of one, possesses a judicial philosophy that would make your hair stand on end. We have been able to stop only three of the nominations. Right now Priscilla Owen is being filibustered. We did stop Charles Pickering and Miguel Estrada, but Pickering is coming up again. And people are hanging in the balance out here that we are going to have to deal with, like Carolyn Kuhl from California, who was in the Reagan administration as a right-wing jurist for the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. I had the *New York Times* editor call me the other day and say, "Where do they dig these people up?" James Leon Holmes, a district court nominee from Arkansas, was president of the anti-trust movement in Arkansas for years and years. He has actually said that women should submit to their husbands, and he is going to be confirmed—both Arkansas senators have said they are going to support him. There is no way we can stop Holmes from being appointed. William Pryor, a nominee from Alabama, is so far right that even the *Washing-*

*Bush is going to remake our courts, and we're going to wake up one day in the United States to find that we aren't in the same country.*

*ton Post* (which has become more and more conservative) editorialized against him.

The Reagan administration started this litmus test on the right to choose. The Bush administration has picked up the mantle of Reagan's commitment to using the courts for change. Bush is going to remake our courts, and we're going to wake up one day in the United States to find that we aren't in the same country that we thought we were in. And if Bush sits in office until 2008, he could possibly have four nominations to the Supreme Court.

William Rehnquist will soon retire. It isn't as if we are going to lose somebody like John Paul Stevens but still, if Rehnquist goes, Antonin Scalia will probably be made chief justice. That is a bad thing. Sandra Day O'Connor may not hang in through another Bush term. She isn't well and has had breast cancer. She functions now but there is grave doubt that she will continue. She is a swing vote. Stevens is eighty-three years old; his wife is ill. I'm worried he will go any day and he is the last of the old liberals on the court. And Ruth Bader Ginsberg is also fighting health issues; she is very frail. If Bush gains reelection, the Supreme Court will be vastly changed along with the lower federal courts, the appellate courts, and the district courts. Individual rights, civil rights, and civil liberties thus hang in the balance.

But there is hope. I have been through the wars and I actually believe we can do a lot as individuals. As a toiler in the vineyards, part of my work is to be an inspiration to people to just get up, do the right thing, and know that we can make change happen. I'm here to help all of the women and men who are out there every day fighting on the ground to preserve reproductive rights, to protect women as they enter the clinics, and protect the doctors who wear

bulletproof vests and work behind bulletproof glass. They are the real heroes because they don't have the same platform as I have. I take my responsibility to them very seriously.

Toward making hope a reality, NARAL now has a mobilization project the likes of which we in the pro-choice movement have never instituted in all of our history. Many of us were born in the 1960s and worked at the grass roots, around the kitchen tables, in communities all around this nation. We were outraged that women were dying because they weren't allowed access to the medical technologies that could save their lives, and their lives weren't valued enough. Indeed, they were humiliated and degraded. NARAL now must hold the lines of pro-choice Americans in a way that has been never done in our history. There is so much at stake. So NARAL is conducting a fast and furious mobilization in fifteen to twenty key states. We intend to find every pro-choice person in those states, identifying them by phone, mail, and door-to-door canvassing. We will enlist them, we will educate them, and we expect to turn them out in 2004.

In the 2002 election we only lost the Senate to right-wing control by forty-three thousand votes. Many of these voters are people who say they are pro-choice but don't vote pro-choice. In 2000, Al Gore won the popular vote. Even with Ralph Nader in the race Gore did win the popular vote; he just didn't win some of the crucial states and that was partly his fault.

The fact is that a lot of people suspend disbelief that this can really happen, that we can lose a right in the United States—we don't lose rights in the United States; *Roe* isn't going to be overturned; Bush isn't really going to do this. But all you have to do is look at what he has already done, what he

*A lot of people suspend disbelief that this can really happen, that we can lose a right in the United States.*

believes, and how zealous he is.

So NARAL is mobilizing people through its choice action network—NARAL's frontline defense. Already three hundred thousand people are part of it, where a member can get information at a moment's notice about what is. People can send an e-mail to Congress or make a phone call.

But people are also needed to help the effort to mobilize. NARAL is going to have a major pro-choice march to save the right to choose—the March for Freedom of Choice: Save Women's Lives. It will be held April 25, 2004, in Washington, DC. And it will be a million people strong. We are going to send a message. We are going to use our organizing for the march as a means to organize for the elections and we are going to turn people out to vote. We have done it before; we can do it again.

Bush may have won a war, but he "won" it in Iraq. He isn't going to win this one. We must stop him from staying in power, and that is what I am devoting NARAL to—by way of fighting for everything else we do every day. You can join us.

*Kate Michelman has served as president of NARAL Pro-Choice America for over eighteen years. This article is adapted from her May 10, 2003, speech in acceptance of the Humanist Heroine Award of the American Humanist Association, conferred at the association's 62nd Annual Conference in Washington, DC. Information on NARAL and its programs is available online at [www.prochoiceamerica.org](http://www.prochoiceamerica.org). Kate is officially stepping down as NARAL Pro-Choice president after the April 25 march. She will be devoting her time to her family and defeating George Bush.*

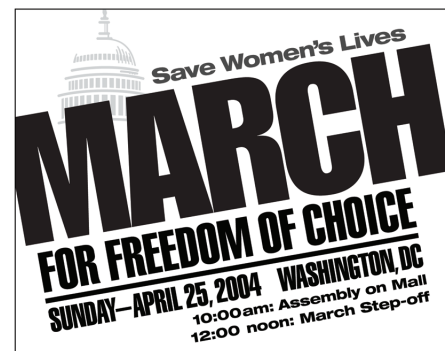
## Feminist Caucus Co-Sponsors Abortion March

The AHA Feminist Caucus, as well as the American Humanist Association, joins hundreds of other groups co-sponsoring the March for Women's Lives in Washington, D.C., on Sunday, April 25.

In this election year, it is vital that feminists and supporters of abortion rights flex our muscles. **If you wish to march with the AHA Feminist Caucus contingent (we have our own banner), meet Feminist Caucus director Annie Laurie Gaylor in the lobby of the Phoenix Park Hotel, 520 N Capitol St NW, by 9 a.m. on Sun., April 25.**

You are cordially invited to a pre-march dinner party on Sat., April 24, at the hotel, to meet and hear *Newsweek* contributing editor Eleanor Clift, whose latest book about the passage of the women's suffrage amendment is *Founding Sisters*. Ms. Clift will sign copies of her book, which will be available for sale.

The event is sponsored by the Freedom From Religion Foundation and costs \$65 per person, including registration and dinner from the acclaimed kitchen of the Phoenix Park Hotel. FFRF has reserved some rooms at the hotel for the convenience of marchers. The hotel is conveniently located 3 blocks from the mall, site of the rally. **See the full-page flyer enclosed for all details, meal choices and sign-up form.**



# IHEU Holds “Empowering Women” Conference

*The International Humanist and Ethical Union hosted an “Empowering Women” conference on Nov. 15 and 16, 2003, in Conway Hall, London. The executive director is Babu Gonineni. Other organizers included Robbi Robson, first Vice President of IHEU.*

*AHA Feminist Caucus director Annie Laurie Gaylor was invited to present the keynote speech. Below is her write-up of remarks by conference presenters:*



**Dr. Demos Gora, granddaughter of the famous atheist Gora, uses traditional dance form to espouse feminism and freethought.**

***“Women’s rights are enjoyed in countries with democracy, good governance, basic infrastructure and economic prosperity.”***

## **India**

“What has a strong, almost overpowering influence on civil society in countries like India and Pakistan? Certainly not the Constitution of these countries,” maintains Sangeeta Mall, managing editor of *The Radical Humanist*, a monthly journal published by the Indian Renaissance Institute.

“Pakistan, submitting to the strident demands of the mullahs, adopted the Sharia law for personal law. India, in contrast, adopted a secular position. Fifty years down the line, there is not much to choose between the countries as far as the rights of women are concerned.”

De facto, she added, “the law of the land has become one that unabashedly keeps women in a second-class position. It is not the Constitution, but the Laws of Manu and the religious texts that are followed.” Manu is the ancient lawgiver of India, particularly of the Hindus.

“A woman, according to Manu, when she is born, belongs to her father, at the time of marriage to her husband, and in old age, to her son. Whether it be India or Pakistan, for the most part women are reduced to the status of chattels, with few economic, civil or political rights.

“India is light years away from universal education.”

Hinduism is opposed to women’s rights, as is custom. Women are dependent on

male relatives. No widows can remarry. Women do not participate in rituals or temples.

“Equal rights, and equal participation in the family is like Latin and Greek to India.” She cited honor killings, girls being made to stand-in for criminal male relatives, or to marry another relative to keep money in the family. In Islam, the mullahs dominate. The Hudood ordinance in Pakistan has its roots in the Koran and “is very barbaric.” *Zina* is the law against adultery used against rape victims, who are required to have “four witnesses.”

“Women’s rights are affected by strife. Women’s rights are enjoyed in countries with democracy, good governance, basic infrastructure and economic prosperity.” She pointed out that a literacy rate of 5% is the peak for women in Afghanistan.

“Civil society has to give thought on how to make one half of its population productive, constructive and functional in its own right. Tokenism in Southeast Asia by women in government does reflect the reality of women’s rights.”



Dr. Indu Grewal, a medical officer, conducted a study to assess the implementation of the Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prevention of Misuse) Act of Government of India. She found that “in many cases, if the parents find that the sex of the baby is female, they opt for an abortion.” She also mentioned the implications of such modern technological developments as genetic screening and cloning for women.

Dr. Grewal pointed to the Manusmriti Ch. 5:148, which says under no circumstances should woman be independent. She also cited:

- Man. Ch 5:155 - There is no “haven” for a woman except to be dedicated to her husband.

- Man. Ch 9:81 - If she doesn’t give birth to a boy in 10 years, the husband can remar-ry.

“May you be the mother of a hundred sons” is a Hindu blessing.

“The solution is advocacy of a rationalist and atheist world.”



Sabita Mishra, a research scholar in the department of sociology in Punjab University, pointed out that Indian women of the upper caste actually lead more circumscribed lives and are less free than lower caste women in the Bihar state. The Bihar state was famous for massacres, dowry burnings, and female infanticide to avoid dowries. Huge dowries are demanded. “Upper caste women have no freedom, and live in purdah and superstition. Lower caste women have more freedoms.”

## Scotland

Joan Gibson, a co-founder of Engender, noted that Scotland has 5 million people. It has been united for 300 years with England, but retained its own church, schools, etc.

Engender was formed in 1993 to promote the equality of women with men and relieve poverty among women in Scotland. “Hitherto Scottish women didn’t exist in statistics,” Gibson noted. “We published a Gender Audit annually for 7 years until the



**Annie Laurie Gaylor with Barbara Smoker, president emerita of the National Secular Society. Barbara is featured in Annie Laurie’s anthology of 50 freethinkers, *Women Without Superstition*.**

Scottish Executive took over the task in 2000. Momentous political changes” took place in Scotland during the 1990s, “and Engender was at the heart of them, making sure that the new Parliament would be more democratic and accessible, and above all ‘women friendly.’ ” Hours of work coincide with school hours and terms. There is gender balance among the convenorships of all Parliamentary committees. Thirty-nine percent of Scottish parliament is now female. She pointed out that in Wales, the parliament is 50/50 male/female. This compares to under 40% female representation in the UK Parliament.

## Australia

Ann Young, president of the Council of Australian Humanist Societies, emailed a report to say the Australian movement has no gender imbalance: the president of the federal body is female, and so are the presidents in 3 of the 4 states with active groups. Two of the three editors of their newsletters are female. Her advice: “Humanist men and women always share equally in the care of their children and other dependents.”

## Nepal

Maya Devi Katuwal, a member of the wo-

**“The solution is advocacy of a rationalist and atheist world.”**

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men's department of the Humanist Association of Nepal (HUMAN), has been working as a health professional "on the matter of the health of women victims of superstition."

Child marriages—the marriage of premenstrual girls arranged by parents—are common in Nepal. Women are banished during menstrual periods, kept in a darkened room. Health problems are attributed to a deity or previous lifetime. Women considered to be witches are subject to such punishments as being fed excreta. Mental problems go undiagnosed or untreated. "Nepal is the only Hindu Kingdom in the world; the caste system is entrenched."

Katuwal regards the Humanist perspective as the most effective tool to address women's issues in Nepal, where witchcraft practices are highly prevalent.

### Norway

Siri Gunn Simonsen, a Board member of the Humanist Association of Norway which she has been a member of since 1980, noted that Norway passed the Equal Status Act, giving women equal rights, in 1978.

"Formally and legally, Norwegian women have the same rights as men. However, legal rights have proved insufficient to ensure women's equal status in society, equal access to important societal positions, or an equal share in the distribution of resources. Today statistics show a clear worsening, despite many plans to ensure equalization."



**Babu Gogineni, director of the International Humanist Ethical Union, with Annie Laurie, and IHEU officer Robbie Robson.**

The ruling political party, the Christian People's Party, is passing new regulations "making it more lucrative to stay at home with babies than work." Women lose status under this system. "Women still constitute a minority among the ruling elites and still face horizontal and vertical divisions of labor between the sexes."

She attributed the backlash to the fact that 70% of women are in the Norwegian labor force. "Legal rights don't always lead to equal valuation," she pointed out. The Christian ruling party is also loathe to interfere with the denial of education to women by Muslim immigrants. There is still Christian education in the schools; you have to opt out. The state pays for nursery care. Simonsen is a qualified anaesthetic nurse, and teaches at the College University of Gjøvik, lecturing mainly on terminal care/palliative care, ethics, and pain relief.

### Sweden

Kaj Foelster, a sociologist by profession, reported that the church has been disestablished in Sweden. She said 77% of women are in the labor market. "Entering the labor market leads to women in politics," she said. There is about 50% female representative in political offices. Women still account for three-quarters of parental leave. Foelster attributed constitutional stability, peace, democracy, secure conditions, and secularism with women's equality. Welfare systems are not family-based, but individual-based. Childbearing is not considered only a private concern.

### Iraq

Houzan Mahmud, who was born in Iraq, left in 1997 and now lives in London, studying at the University of London. A political activist and feminist, she is editor of "Equal Rights Now!" the English-language official publication of the Iraqi Women's Rights Coalition.

Before the Baath party took control, women had no veil, full education and the right to go abroad and enter professions, she reported. Under the Baathist regime,

***“The movements of secularism, atheism, women’s liberation have made women and youth champions of a battle threatening the basic pillars of Islam.”***



**Jane Wynne Willson, author of *Funerals without God*, was a conference organizer.**

women as judges.

“Rape is the norm,” she said. Women victims of rape fear being killed by family members. She also reported that the Ruling Council wants to change the date of International Women’s Day to the birthdate of Mohammad’s daughter Fatima.

The Organization of Women’s Freedom was established in June 2003, to promote the separation of religion and government, a secular constitution, freedom of dress, and challenge of Islamic trends.

“Many Iraqi women do not want a political Islam and ‘America’s New order.’ Women in Iraq have been struck between two poles of terrorism.” Her online newspaper can be found at: [www.equalityiniraq.com](http://www.equalityiniraq.com).

## **Iran**

Azam Kamguian, an Iranian writer and women’s rights activist, was a medical student at Pahlavi University in Shiraz, until she was arrested and imprisoned for a year for organizing student protests. She was imprisoned a second time after the Islamic Republic of Iran took power, and was released from prison in 1983, after brutal treatment, including constant torture and solitary confinement.

Her books include *Islam, Women, Challenges and Perspectives; Feminism, Socialism*

and *Human Nature; On Religion; Women’s Liberation and Political Processes in the Middle East; Islam and Womens’ Rights, and Godlessness, Freedom from Religion and Humanist Happiness.*

lost many rights, and could be beheaded for prostitution. She noted that despite its sanctions, the United States originally supported Saddam’s regime, as it supported the Taliban. The war has opened Iraq to clerics wanting to establish a Taliban-like government. Mullahs are banning

and Human Nature; On Religion; Women’s Liberation and Political Processes in the Middle East; Islam and Womens’ Rights, and Godlessness, Freedom from Religion and Humanist Happiness.

Now living in London, she is founder and chairperson of the Committee to Defend Women’s Rights in the Middle East and editor of its bulletin.

Kamguian said: “Women struggle for secularism and liberation in Iran,” which practices gender apartheid. At the time of the 1979 revolution, women were “massively involved in public life, as teachers, students,” although still repressed by family law under Islamic Courts.

“It is still very hard to remember, after 24 years, how it used to be for women,” she said. “Women were the first victims of political Islam, but also the fighters against it. Eighty percent of resisters are the young women born into an Islamic state. Tens of thousands have fought the rule and have been attacked: beaten, flogged, imprisoned.

“The movements of secularism, atheism, women’s liberation have made women and youth champions of a battle threatening the basic pillars of Islam. We are not far from the days when women will be throwing away veils and burning them.”

She considered the fact that two-thirds of the population are young to be critical to the campaign for separation of church and state.

## **Poland**

Agnieszka Wolk-Laniewska spoke about the image of women in the Polish media and the losses since perestroika. Abortion, which had been legal since 1956, was banned after the communist rule was overturned. Day cares are no longer free. The pressure is for women to stay home and become moms. A government marriage manual portrays women as subservient.

“The Catholic Church in Poland is trying to get women in the darkness and they’re doing a very good job,” she added. Feminists are typically labeled “pro-communist.”

*“The union of religious beliefs with the power of government is woman’s greatest threat. Secularism is woman’s best friend.”*

## Slovakia

Viera Falgunova said the situation in Slovakia is very similar to Poland, “but not so good.

“There is a conspiracy of Slovakia and the Vatican against democracy,” she asserted. After the Nov. 1989 overturn of former Czechoslovakia, Catholicism was adopted as the state ideology, disregarding the rights of the 35.3% of the nation who are atheists or “indifferent.” There is not one single female on the new cabinet, she said. In 2002, women made up 19.3% of parliament.

Since 1989, churches, etc., have been generously subsidized by all taxpayers. “Slovakia is a Taliban-like fundamentalist Catholic state. We are seeking international pressure.”

## Nigeria

Athanasius Nweke, a member of the Humanist Friendship Center in Nigeria now studying in Denmark, said women’s subjection is the norm in Nigeria. He pointed to the case of Amina Lawal, the unwed mother who barely escaped being stoned to death last fall, as symbolizing the struggles of women in West Africa.

“Tradition in Nigeria has meant women are to be seen and not heard. Women are ‘inferior.’ ”

In Muslim Nigeria, men can marry 4 wives. “Lots of concubines are even kept by Christians.”

He concluded: “If you take care of a mother, you take care of a nation. If you educate a mother, you educate a nation.” His hope is in grassroots education and the employment of women.

## USA

“Margaret Sanger always observed the retrogressive effect of war on civil rights: had it not been for World War I and World War II, she felt the battle to give women access to birth control would have been won in short order. War, like religion, is such a waste of lives, time and energy.

“Until the current threat is diminished, and the current administration is out of

office, the work to enhance human liberty is imperiled worldwide. The administration policies are not just a threat to women, the separation of church and state, and the environment. The policies of pre-emptive strikes and pre-emptive war constitute a threat to American freedom, the Bill of Rights, the Constitution and rule of law, whatever hapless country is next in line, and to our planet’s survival. The good news is: patriotic dissent is alive and well,” said AHA Feminist director Annie Laurie Gaylor.

She pointed out that the Equal Rights Amendment is still not enshrined in the US Constitution. The US has never elected a woman president, while currently there are 17 heads of state who are women worldwide. Only 13% of the US Senate is female and 14% of the House of Representatives. Women fill about 22% of state legislative seats. The US ranks 59th out of 181 nations in which women are elected to national legislatures.

Abortion is still legal, but hangs by a swing vote. “Catholics and fundamentalists are working, not always together but in concert to attack secular gains, attain public aid for religiously-segregated schools, to try to repeal abortion rights, put prayer and the Ten Commandments in public schools, fight gay rights and marriage, and otherwise legislate their dogma.” She attacked the Global Gag rule for devastating health care and reproductive choices for millions of women, the impact of the war on Iraqi women, and the fact that the USA still has not ratified CEDAW, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination, 24 years after it was adopted by the UN General Assembly.

“Beliefs inconsistent with the known laws of science and reason have been used to hold women in subjection, to deny women rights, to punish, to diminish, even to terrorize. The union of such beliefs with the power of government is woman’s greatest threat. Secularism is woman’s best friend.”

## Global

“If you educate a man, you educate an indi-

**“Slovakia is  
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ist Catholic  
state.”**

vidual; if you educate a woman, you educate a family.”—Mahatma Gandhi.

“Every minute of every day, somewhere in the world and most likely in a developing country, a woman dies from complications of pregnancy and childbirth. When a mother dies, children lose their support and care, and therefore the next generation suffers. Mortality and morbidity rates are unacceptable in many developing countries. Reproductive and sexual health education programs are the key to moving toward global change and health,” said Geeta Nargund, a senior lecturer in Obstetrics and Gynecology, and Honorary consultant in reproductive medicine at St. Georges Hospital Medical School, London.

Globally, 22% of all pregnancies are aborted, with 40% of these abortions under unsafe conditions, Dr. Nargund added. There are 910,000 daily conceptions and

390,000 live births. She said 174 million children are malnourished.



Roy Brown, president of the IHEU, founded the World Population Foundation, a Dutch NGO. He spoke about how to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, reaffirmed by 189 member states at the Millennium Summit in September 2000. Those goals include universal primary education, gender equality, improved maternal health, reduction of child mortality, and combating HIV/AIDS, TB, malaria and other diseases.

Diana Brown, co-founder of the World Population with her husband Roy, observed: “Where the status of women is low, they are most likely to be viewed primarily in a sexual or reproductive capacity.” There are 135 million women who have been victims of genital mutilation.

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## Equal Rights Amendment

*Continued page 2*

guarantee unless and until the Constitution is amended to make it happen. The Equal Rights Amendment, “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex,” will provide that guarantee if and when it is added to the Constitution. Today the ERA, widely considered “dead” for two decades, is very much alive again. And Humanists, especially those who identify themselves as feminists, have special opportunities to help make the ERA happen.

Unlike male citizens, all of whom won equal protection of the laws in 1868 (14th Amendment) and the right to vote in 1870 (15th Amendment), women had to struggle until 1920 to win one—but only one—right: the right to vote (19th Amendment). That was a monumental step forward, but it was far from full equality.

Damaging sex stereotypes and self-fulfilling prophecies made the then-existing pervasive and egregious discrimination

daunting indeed to combat. Women were forced to make progress slowly and painfully, fighting against and working to replace damaging laws and practices one by one, year by year, issue by issue, often state by state, community by community, institution by institution, employer by employer. Some of their efforts eventually succeeded. But without equal rights specifically guaranteed in the Constitution, all such gains were—and still are—easily, and not infrequently, weakened, inadequately enforced, ignored, or even overturned. The taxing struggle required in 2002-2003 to save Title IX, at least temporarily, from crippling regulatory reinterpretation is just one example of the great vulnerability of existing protections against sex discrimination.

When the ERA is finally achieved, women will no longer have to prove, case by case, that in a particular situation, they “deserve” equal rights with men: It will be a given, and that will make a profound difference, both practically and symbolically. And

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in instances in which men are the class discriminated against, the Equal Rights Amendment will apply just as strongly: Discrimination on the basis of sex—either female or male—will finally be subject to the strictest level of judicial scrutiny.

Today, the American people are decidedly ready for Constitutionally-guaranteed equal rights for men and women: A July 2001 nationwide survey by Opinion Research Corporation showed that 96% of American adults believe that male and female citizens of the US should have equal rights, and 88% believe that our Constitution should explicitly guarantee those rights. Having the ERA in the Constitution will simply recognize what the American people already want—and are right to want: equal justice under the law.

The ERA was passed by Congress in 1972, and sent for ratification by the required three quarters of the states. By 1977, it had been ratified by 35 state legislatures, but the effort stalled because of powerful, well-funded opposition forces that mightily benefited—and/or profited—from keeping women second-class citizens in both the workforce and society as a whole. The ERA failed to achieve the necessary 38 ratifications before the 1982 expiration of the stated ratification deadline. Women's rights activists, devastated by the defeat, went back to the continuing struggle to maintain past gains and move forward in bits and pieces as opportunities arose.

However, the dream refused to die. The ERA has been reintroduced in every session of Congress since 1982, in a “start-over” effort requiring fresh passage by two-thirds of both Houses of Congress and fresh ratification by a full 38 states. In the current Congress, the “start-over” ERA bills are S.J. Res.11 (chief sponsor Sen. Edward Kennedy), which has 20 cosponsors, and H.J. Res.37 (chief sponsor Rep. Carolyn Maloney), with 203 cosponsors (both as of December 2003).

But there is another strategy that is currently being vigorously pursued by many ERA activists, as a potentially more rapid

way to achieve the ERA. Dubbed the “three-state” strategy, it aims to succeed by adding just three more state ratifications to the 35 obtained in the 1970's.

This innovative strategy is based upon solid legal analyses. The 1972 Congressionally imposed seven-year ratification time limit placed on the ERA was not contained in the text of the amendment itself. The legal weakness of that time limit was confirmed when a different session of Congress, in 1979, voted to extend the time limit three more years, to 1982. That established a precedent that any session of Congress could, similarly, further extend the time limit—or perhaps eliminate it altogether. Also, an argument has sometimes been made that even without a stated time limit, ratification of an amendment should be accomplished within some “reasonably contemporaneous” time period. Would 30 or 40 years (the ERA was sent to the states for ratification some 32 years ago) be “too long?” This argument abruptly lost any semblance of validity in 1992: The “Madison” Amendment (relating to Congressional pay raises), that had been proposed by James Madison and passed by Congress in 1789, finally achieved ratification by the required 3/4ths of the states in 1992, after a ratification period of 203 years – and was promptly added to the Constitution. (Note: Court rulings and precedents confirm that once a state ratifies an amendment, it has no power to rescind that ratification.)

ERA proponents all around the country, including a network of representatives of many of the 200-plus member organizations of the influential NCWO (National Council of Women's Organizations – itself solidly behind the ratification of the ERA) are hard at work, particularly in some of the not-yet-ratified states. One of those states, Illinois, is as of this writing on the brink of ratification: The ERA was passed by the Illinois House of Representatives on May 21, 2003, and then voted out of a Senate committee to the floor of the Senate. If, as hoped, the Illinois Senate passes the ERA in 2004, that will make Illinois the 36th state

to ratify. Then there will be just two more to go.

Vigorous ratification campaigns are underway in a number of other not-yet-ratified states. Florida is particularly active; ERA bills were introduced, and have been voted out of committee, in both houses of their legislature. In Missouri, numerous and very well organized ERA activists are working nonstop. Growing efforts are also underway in Georgia, Oklahoma, Arizona, Arkansas, and Virginia. Note: A “dark horse” could suddenly appear from among the other not-yet-ratified states. All it will take will be a legislature that “wakes up” to the opportunity to do something really important for the women of their state and the nation, and then vote to make it happen.

Three-state strategy proponents are also working toward passage of whatever Congressional legislation may be required, such as extending or eliminating the earlier time limit and/or validating the completion of the ratification process. Rep. Robert Andrews (D-NJ) introduced such legislation (H.Res.38) in the current Congress; it has 27 cosponsors thus far [in December 2003].

*What feminist humanists can do to help:*

Sign up for the ERA Campaign Network free e-mail newsletter, *The ERA Campaigner* (e-mail ERACampaign@aol.com) to be kept informed of what’s happening in the campaign to achieve the ERA; you can also request ERA literature to distribute, at local AHA meetings or elsewhere. Visit the ERA Campaign Network website, [www.ERACampaign.net](http://www.ERACampaign.net), for additional information, including contact

information on all 36 coordinators in 21 states.

Contact your Congressional Representative: urge him/her to demonstrate his/her commitment to equal rights for women by cosponsoring both H.J.Res.37 (Rep. Carolyn Maloney’s “start-over” ERA resolution) and H.Res.38.(Rep. Robert Andrews’ “3-state strategy” resolution). If he/she is already a cosponsor, your contact will still help, by showing constituent support for that action.

Contact your congressional senators and, similarly, urge them to cosponsor S.J. Res.11 (Sen. Kennedy’s “start-over” ERA resolution).

If you live in a not-yet-ratified state (Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Missouri, Mississippi, Nevada, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Utah, Virginia), contact your representative and senator in your state legislature, and urge him/her to work for, cosponsor and vote for ERA ratification.

The Equal Rights Amendment is unfinished business for the Constitution. It *will* be achieved, and present and future generations of women—and men—will thank us for it, and wonder why it took so long. It is simple justice, it is long overdue, and it is time!

*Jennifer S. Macleod is a social scientist, a feminist activist since 1969, a long-time member of the American Humanist Association and its Feminist Caucus, and National Coordinator of the ERA Campaign Network. E-mail ERACampaign@aol.com, telephone 609-799-0378, postal address 4 Canoe Brook Drive, Princeton Junction, NJ 08550.*

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